

Tom Ruhle 2  
Interview by Nancy Solomon  
April 3, 1997

#### Side A

10% less shellfish annually before brown tide. Oysters, weakfish and blowfish have disappeared. Striped bass declined but are now back. There is a battle between sports and commercial fishers. 1978 – tried to outlaw shellfish diving in East Hampton. Baymen's techniques are inefficient. Divers used wet suits, mask, fins, some used scuba tanks. Clams spawn in June. Winter – clams are thicker and tastier. There are 5 divers today. Tom started as a kid. He does not use a boat.

Soft clams – need low tide and sunlight to harvest them. Live in intertidal area. Illegal to harvest at night. Northwest winds and high pressure makes soft clamming easier – there is less water in the bay. Long handles on rakes make tides less a factor.

Tom sells to Gosman's in Montauk, Stuart's Fish Market in East Hampton. Gosman's treats him well and they are loyal and honest. At times he has gotten stuck with clams. Scallops were always sold. Sold scallops to shucking houses in Amagansett. He was paid more money for shucked scallops. Stayed up until 1 am shucking. Sometimes it was hard to sell in winter. Prefers harvesting to selling. Spent 200 days approximately on the water.

Cannot afford to work on the bay today. Worked for his father's carpentry business off-season. Problems caused by jet and water skiers, mosquitoes, storms.

Ran for town council in East Hampton and won in 1988. Went to college. Misses the bay – it was prosperous when he worked it in the 1970s and 1980s. Brown tide arrived in 1986.

#### Side B

Tom's cat loved raw scallops. Would eat small ones when he was shucking.

Map depths are not accurate. Differences between 1 and 3-feet of water. Bay shorelines have eroded. Shellfish are not affected by erosion. Jet skis banned in East Hampton harbor. More boats have appeared recently. The bay is improving. Less garbage is thrown overboard. "Non point is killing us." Parkways did not go the Hamptons until the late 1960s.

"The collapse of the fishing industry and the reduction in the quality of the bays has been directly related to the increase in population."

End.